

YOU ARE RIGHT COMMISSIONER VELLA - THE SOLUTIONS TO WOLF MANAGEMENT ARE TO BE FOUND AT LOCAL AND NATIONAL LEVELS, NOT IN BRUSSELS

Brussels, 2 July 2018 - It is time for Environment Commissioner Vella to be true to his words, expressed at a recent meeting in the European Parliament, that successful coexistence with wolves must be based on local solutions and to recognise in practice the right of Member States to use the tools at their disposal to ensure the long-term conservation and management of their wolf populations.

The numbers and concentration of wolves in certain regions across Germany and the Nordic countries are high, resulting in economic losses for farmers, killed dogs and damages to the game management in some areas. To be successful, management should be adaptive both in terms of the species' conservation and management needs and in terms of the needs of people living locally with the species.

The Commission should very carefully reassess its ongoing infringement cases against Sweden and Finland. The highest Swedish judiciary has clarified that the number of wolves in the country are above the required biological levels under EU law and that there is no other satisfactory alternative to licensed hunting to deal with the resulting negative socio-economic consequences. A similar case is pending before the highest Finnish judiciary. These cases add the necessary legal clarity to the already broad political and scientific support at national and local levels for the overall wolf management frameworks in both countries.

The implementation of the national decisions taken with broad scientific and political consensus in both Finland and Sweden have been regularly disrupted by the ongoing infringement cases over the past decade. This situation has made it difficult to enable a sound and long-term management of the wolf. Accumulating scientific evidence highlights the correlations between the Commission's interference in national management programmes and increases in illegal killing. The Commission maybe needs to take a step back and allow the national implementation to be successful in these countries.

Moreover, the interventions by the Commission in Finland and Sweden also risk having a blocking effect on necessary management decisions at national and regional levels in other countries, such as Germany, which are experiencing a rapid growth in the number of wolves with similar challenges as in the Nordic countries.

Acceptance requires a well-balanced management approach taking into account the needs of society in the areas where wolves have recolonised. Loss of acceptance among the rural population is the most dangerous threat to the return of the wolf into areas where they did not occur for decades or centuries. A specific problem in this regard is when national governments disown their responsibility by pointing at Brussels and the European Commission, and such inaction undermines solutions at local level. Instead of being involved in the details of management, the Commission should focus on finding solutions for potential conflicts with other European Union legal instruments, for example, the conflict between grants for livestock protection and article 107 TFEU. The Commission should clarify that these aids are considered to be compatible with the internal market.

Furthermore, it is biologically and legally essential that the Commission proceeds with a speedy review of the protection status of Europe's wolf populations under the EU Habitats Directive and assesses whether a more flexible and pragmatic system of species conservation and management is necessary. This policy request has also been made vehemently by the European Federation for Hunting and Conservation (FACE). There is a clear legal obligation under the directive to do so.

Karl-Heinz Florenz, Member of the European Parliament and President of the Parliament's Intergroup "Biodiversity, Hunting, Countryside"; Torbjörn Larsson, President of the Nordic Hunters' Alliance; and Hartwig Fischer, President of the German Hunting Federation.